

Singapore Management University
Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University

Social Space

Lien Centre for Social Innovation

2008

Overseas Giving: Should Charity Begin at Home?

Chi Chiu Tan

Follow this and additional works at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lien_research

Part of the [Policy Design, Analysis, and Evaluation Commons](#), [Public Policy Commons](#), and the [Social Welfare Commons](#)

Citation

Tan, Chi Chiu. Overseas Giving: Should Charity Begin at Home?. (2008). *Social Space*. 90-100. Social Space.

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/lien_research/4

This Journal Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Lien Centre for Social Innovation at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Space by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email libIR@smu.edu.sg.



OVERSEAS GIVING: **SHOULD CHARITY BEGIN AT HOME?**

In extending a hand overseas with developmental and humanitarian aid, is Singapore doing what is best for itself and the recipient communities? And what role does its government have to play in this arena? Dr Tan Chi Chiu weighs in.



Combined Singapore relief teams,
Muzaffarabad, Pakistan
Earthquake 2005

Photos Courtesy of Dr. Tan Chi Chui.

As Singapore pulls ahead of its neighbours in development and wealth¹, its potential and obligation to contribute to the development of less developed nations around us have correspondingly increased. As natural disasters affect the region, Singapore's obvious ability to mount sophisticated relief operations or offer humanitarian aid also raises expectations. Thrown into this mix of expectations is the fact that, along with its developed infrastructure and affluence, Singapore has also raised a new generation of materially well-off and cosseted young citizens which has little experience of privations and poverty, and which may not have empathy for the less fortunate even at home, let alone those in other countries. These same young people face the challenges of one day perhaps having to leave the comfort zone of home and learning to interact with other countries and cultures in a rapidly globalising economy.

On the face of things, these factors provide imperatives for Singapore to engage its neighbours through philanthropic and voluntary work, not only for the benefit of beneficiary nations but also for global exposure of Singaporeans, cultural understanding and to raise the sensitivities of Singaporeans towards poorer people in the region.

But do these imperatives necessarily give Singaporeans carte blanche to launch and reach out abroad through government and non-government organisations utilising national resources or money that could otherwise be spent on local charities? Or should overseas outreach programmes have constraints and boundaries defined by national interests? Specifically, where does the nexus between an obligation, as responsible global citizens, to help other nations, and narrower national and individual self-interests lie? Should resources be expended abroad at all while there is even one under-privileged person in Singapore left to support? And finally, in a non-profit landscape that is already comprehensively occupied by the government through patronage or network influence, what are the relative roles of government and civil society in mobilising Singaporeans to strike out abroad for the greater good of humanity?

Overseas Development Programmes

In 1992, the Singapore Cooperation Programme was set up under the aegis of the Technical Cooperation Directorate, a division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme brings together all technical transfer activities

conducted by the government since the 1960s, and partners with developed nations such as Japan, France and Australia as well as global agencies such as the Asian Development Bank, Commonwealth Secretariat and even the International Atomic Energy Agency. The foreign policy imperatives of such activities are self-evident: Although the Programme's website² states that it has reached out to 49,000 government officials from 168 different developing countries, it is clear that most effort is concentrated in ASEAN countries and other Asia-Pacific countries with geo-political importance to Singapore. It is also less of a people-to-people programme, as the recipients tend to be government officers.

The Singapore government is also a major stake holder of the Singapore International Foundation, which receives substantial government grants to support its programmes, including its flagship Singapore Volunteers Overseas (SVO) programme.³ The SVO dispatches volunteers to conduct training and service stints for as long as two years for individuals and for much briefer engagements over many years for specialist teams. This programme is akin to one of the best-known and most well-established international service organisations in the world, the American Peace Corps, from which the SVO took its inspiration when it was set up in 1991.

Established in 1961 with a charter to promote world peace and democracy and to promote the American way of life, the Peace Corps has always been unashamedly an American government agency.⁴ Like SVO, it has never been, and is not, an independent non-profit entity. Nevertheless, the two bodies' similar aims of meeting community needs in third world countries and fostering mutual understanding between the sending country and recipient countries and cultures, are universally applicable. In the SVO's case, its target countries and the projects it conducts ostensibly reflect government foreign policy, since these projects are mostly funded by the government. The difference is that America has numerous non-government agencies that are also extremely effective in global development work, such as CARE International and numerous wealthy foundations, nowadays led by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Singapore, on the other hand, is infinitely smaller and the possibility of growing organisations as effective as the Singapore Cooperation Programme or SVO is much reduced.

Whereas community building activities abroad conducted by Singaporeans are not confined to



South coast of Sri Lanka after the Tsunami 2005

government-led initiatives, there are few non-governmental organisations that do this to any significant degree. Those with their own money are able to operate their own agenda and chief amongst these are the larger philanthropic foundations such as the Lien Foundation's LienAid. Its agenda is entirely altruistic, and it does significant work with the poor and needy in the region. Another is the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation.

The newly-minted Temasek Foundation professes to be independent of Temasek Holdings in carrying out its philanthropic mission in Asia, but as it is the corporate social responsibility arm of the latter, it is questionable whether activity completely free of business sensibilities and government influence is possible, despite a reputable and independent board. These are in the early days, and the Foundation's true effectiveness in global development is yet to be demonstrated.

Other corporation-based philanthropic agencies, such as CapitaLand Hope Foundation, engage in overseas assistance in a desultory manner,

mostly by funding disparate projects rather than proactively organising them. UNIFEM Singapore, which serves as the National Committee of the Development Fund for Women in the United Nations, concentrates on economic empowerment, leadership development and conflict issues for women. As part of its mission, it conducts a number of skills transfer and medical projects in the region.⁵

Raleigh Society Singapore, an offshoot of Operation Raleigh and Raleigh International, mobilises youth to help in regional projects in construction, conservation and limited skills transfer. Other charity groups such as the larger and well-funded religious organisations like the Christian churches, also run programmes in the region with money donated by their congregations.

Overall, Singapore's non-government overseas development projects are not as highly organised, cohesive or globally impactful as the nature of Singapore society and the quality of its contributions in other areas of endeavour suggest they could be. One reason could be that, as with

other charitable funding in Singapore, money available to non-governmental organisations for overseas development work is limited by the small pool of donors available and the focus given by the government to the funding of social services through the Community Chest, above all other causes.

The Singapore Red Cross Society (SRCS) is surprisingly reticent in this area. Certainly, there has been a small number of Singaporeans who have been sent overseas under the Red Cross banner to work as 'Development Delegates' for the Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in developing countries, but apart from this small contribution, the Singaporean chapter is relatively uninvolved in global development work, preferring to concentrate on social services locally and fund-raising for the amelioration of natural disasters abroad⁶, areas in which it absolutely excels. There are constitutional reasons for this.

For starters, the SRCS was created by an act of the Singaporean parliament in 1973 and its chairman is appointed by the President of Singapore. Its charter is consistent with that of the international Red Cross movement, and it does tremendous work in Singapore as well as in international humanitarian assistance. However, it also takes cues from the government, rather than act as a completely independent player that takes its authority from the Red Cross headquarters in Geneva.

The arrangement whereby a national Red Cross Society is co-opted by the local government is not unknown, nor even the most extreme. For example, the Lao Red Cross is a department of the Laotian government and headed by a minister.

Humanitarian Disaster Relief Work

The outpouring of goodwill following disasters should represent the purest expression of the human spirit and compassion. So, whilst public contributions to overseas developmental work may be scanty, one would expect that natural disasters would strike an empathetic chord amongst Singaporeans who would then loosen their purse strings to support disaster relief work. Maybe. Maybe not.

In larger nations, many organisations are available to channel aid. Singapore is a small country with limited options. In addition, the government has considerable influence over which organisations take the lead. Indeed, its

management of disaster relief activities appears to be, like in development work, ostensibly in accordance with foreign affairs policy and the wish to control expressions of Singapore's external diplomacy. It is probably also to ensure that the limited resources of our small nation are harnessed and coordinated to provide timely, efficient and effective aid overseas.

To be able to lead in a significant way in disaster relief requires the government's official endorsement. On Singapore's rationale for international giving, former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong has admitted that the "challenge is more subtle and exacting than simply reaching into pockets" and that "aid can be politically sensitive and must be offered sensitively".⁷ UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland's term "competition in compassion" comes to mind when one realises that governments use humanitarian aid as an expression of foreign policy and as a tool of diplomacy⁸. In the past, the government has tailored its response according to the country involved, though this approach has not escaped criticism. When Gujarat was shaken by an earthquake in 2001, Singapore contributed only a token US\$50,000 in the form of supplies. That the public was not impressed, as evidenced by letters to the press⁹, was the most likely reason for the government's subsequent clarification that Singapore's response to overseas disasters could not be viewed in isolation, or solely by the quantum of its contributions. It had to be seen as the sum total of all efforts by all sectors and every Singaporean.¹⁰ It is probably in advancement of this concept that the government has gone beyond its previous *modus operandi* in using the armed forces and civil defence forces

*Author performing minor surgery
at makeshift field hospital,
Muzaffarabad, Pakistan
Earthquake 2005*





Medical relief mission of Parkway Health led by author, Central Java Earthquake 2006

primarily, to regarding civilian governmental and non-governmental agencies as part of the national response, for which it takes national responsibility and credit.

In the aftermath of the tsunami, the government's overwhelming emphasis on Aceh was appropriate and expected, from both the humanitarian as well as the political points of view. However, once the government was involved, directly or behind the scenes, most of the resources available were directed in accordance with government wishes; this left other areas, for example Sri Lanka, the second worst affected region, with no more than token assistance by the government and some civil groups.

A cursory look at the organisations most involved in the tsunami-relief efforts reveals that there were only three major players. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) mounted the largest peace-time operation in its history. Of the civil agencies, the involvement of the SRCS was entirely expected. What was surprising was the rapid promotion to the frontline of Mercy Relief. A small and relatively new humanitarian

relief agency, it had seemed, at first, somewhat overwhelmed by the expectations suddenly placed upon it.¹¹ To its credit, it rose wonderfully to the occasion. All other civil participants were, for all intents and purposes, under the coordination of the SRCS or Mercy Relief.

Thus, government control in Singapore also extends to humanitarian aid in times of international disaster. The government appears to prefer using the SAF for its medical, engineering and logistics expertise. This is an excellent use of the massive capabilities of the SAF during peacetime. It is perhaps sensible not to encourage the development of civilian disaster relief capabilities since a country with limited resources should not duplicate operational capabilities unnecessarily. There are advantages in having a government lead the way with the armed or civil defence forces and indicate its preferred civilian agencies for providing additional support. Resources are immediately brought in line with an overarching plan of action, there is little duplication of resource utilisation or efforts, and public support is harmonised and guaranteed.

The SRCS' relatively limited overseas operational capability for disaster relief, when compared to Red Cross Societies in Japan, Korea or other developed countries, also appears to reflect this national 'plan' of rationalisation of resources. But its operational capabilities are so limited that it takes the appearance of being relegated to coming up behind the frontline efforts of the SAF, and even Mercy Relief, when it could be taking to the field in a much more significant way.

However, in the management of post disaster relief and reconstruction, the SRCS comes into its own magnificently. It was named by the government as the national fundraising agency for the tsunami and given the mandate to manage Singapore's 'Tidal Waves Asia Fund'. Through this funnelling of donations on behalf of the nation, the Fund accumulated a remarkable sum of S\$88 million (with appeals for the public to stop, the sum was so great), something perhaps unattainable without the active endorsement and promotion of the fund by the government itself. The SRCS managed the Fund with great diligence, responsibility and effectiveness, financing reconstruction projects in Aceh, Sri Lanka and Maldives that could be viewed as going well beyond mere 'rebuilding' into the realm of development, since the facilities exceeded what was there before the tsunami. At the end of 2007, S\$83 million of the S\$88 million had been well spent.¹² The role of the Singapore Red Cross as the national focus of this effort was in accordance with government policy.¹³

Whereas the Tidal Waves Asia Fund was a resounding success, a side effect was that other potential centres of fund raising for tsunami relief received relatively little public support. Even the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), which set up its own Tsunami Affected Communities Fund, received less than S\$400,000.¹⁴ This amply illustrates the power of government endorsement and support. The SRCS is part of the network of a global non-partisan, non-government organisation, while the SIF is, for all intents and purposes, a government unit. But if the former body is chosen by government to lead, ironically even the latter cannot come a close second. What of other civil agencies? Since most of donations by Singaporeans went into the Tidal Waves Asia Fund, organisations that wanted to embark on reconstruction had to go to the Fund's management committee to make a request for financing for their proposed projects. Some chafed at the conservative criteria applied to approve projects. In the process, project

There is no doubt that overseas development and humanitarian relief work benefit the recipient communities. More importantly, beyond any diplomatic considerations, such work benefits Singaporean society as a whole.

proposals were forced to higher standards of quality and accountability, which was a good thing. However, agencies with priorities or plans that were different from those held by the Fund's management committee may not have found funding for their projects. Effectively then, otherwise independent agencies' efforts came under national control.

Still, there is a strong argument to be made for a more diverse landscape peopled by different players. The point is, outside of a small circle, there is very little opportunity for 'independent' groups to establish themselves and be useful to their fullest potential. While it is desirable in the government's eyes to ensure that the people's money channelled through non-profit organisations is responsibly spent, there remains an unstated paternalism and distrust of the civil sector. As with the social sector, this degree of 'management' means that there has been little spontaneous evolution and development of quality disaster relief capability in Singapore and the sector continues to rely on government intervention or facilitation to do its work well. On the other side of the coin, lack of government support can spell the end of a programme.



Singapore medical team seeing patients in a field hospital, Muzaffarabad, Pakistan Earthquake 2005

One good example was the SIF's Humanitarian Relief Programme. This was an internal initiative that began in 2001 to build a core group of disaster relief experts who would partner other willing agencies in Singapore, grow capacity together and coordinate efforts towards greater efficiency and effectiveness. It set out to work with the hospital clusters, SRCS and Mercy Relief. Despite demonstrable capability and significant successes in numerous projects, as well as a growing national and international reputation¹⁵, this unit was closed down quietly in 2004. The reason for this is unclear. When the Tsunami occurred, several local agencies called up asking to work with Humanitarian Relief Programme on acute phase relief operations. Instead, they were advised that that it was no longer in existence, and they should look elsewhere, such as to Mercy Relief or the Red Cross, which did receive the government's endorsement. In retrospect therefore, it may be conjectured that the Humanitarian Relief Programme did not fit into the government's overall plan for the humanitarian relief landscape of Singapore.

Interestingly, during the Pakistani earthquake of 2005, Mercy Relief teamed up with SRCS to initiate 'Team Singapore': an effort that brought participating civil agencies under one coordinating umbrella for the sake of logistics and operational efficiencies and a unified national banner.¹⁶ Mercy Relief readily acknowledged that it had learned this concept from the Humanitarian Relief Programme.

Team Singapore was a great success and there was every hope that this system would be institutionalised. Unfortunately, when the Yogyakarta earthquake of 2006 occurred, Team Singapore failed to materialise, despite early pronouncements by both organisations that it probably would, and participating agencies were once again left to their own devices. The reason for this failure of joint leadership between Mercy Relief and SRCS was never explained. It may be that at least part of the problem was that the organisations involved had not established their natural niches in the disaster relief ecosystem. In general, the players need to mature in an unconstrained environment that allows each

There remains a school of thought that denies the value of short-term engagements such as student projects or doing projects as part of vacations, a recent phenomenon dubbed ‘voluntourism’.

to gain self-confidence, find their feet and forge naturally evolving interrelationships that are based on mutual respect for one another's capabilities and less encumbered by political considerations. It may be less tidy in the process, but the sector can only emerge stronger.

Attitudes are changing, albeit slowly. Post-tsunami, the Singaporean government actively invited the contributions of other participants as part of the national effort. For example, civilian doctors were invited onto SAF missions to Aceh. Still, old ways die hard. When Parkway Health organised a private medical relief mission to Sri Lanka and approached a well-respected Member of Parliament for support, he blurted, “Who gave you permission to go? Have you got approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?” Subsequently, the Minister for Health presented awards to all healthcare workers who participated in the tsunami relief operation, whether through the government or independently. Such inclusiveness was significant and refreshing.

The Development Of Society Through Overseas Projects

There is no doubt that overseas development and humanitarian relief work benefit the recipient communities. More importantly, beyond any diplomatic considerations, such work benefits Singaporean society as a whole. Participation in overseas community projects allows a breadth and depth of personal development that is not possible to achieve at home. It highlights our societal evolution from a Third-World recipient mentality to that of a First-World contributor. In working overseas ‘on behalf’ of Singapore, individuals develop national identity and cohesiveness, and this in turn leads to an active citizenry. Along the way, of course, there is a diplomatic dividend from such participation, provided it is done sensitively.

All over the world, young people are encouraged to leave the comfort of their home countries to provide help overseas. This is not because young people always have the necessary expertise. Often they do not. But the youth have a tremendous responsibility (and capability) to understand and engage the world at large; not only to help the process of solving some of the world's most pressing problems and to foster international understanding and tolerance, but also to help their own nations in their imperative to globalise and develop an international citizenry.

Engagement by youth in world affairs and international service is an important mutually beneficial affair. The youth can provide valuable service to the global community, while at the same time developing their own insight and capabilities as part of their life education. Youth benefit from opportunities to learn how to be adaptable to different cultures and social environments, so as to be comfortable working in and contributing to diverse communities. Youth can globalise their knowledge and skills to serve communities outside of their own.

However, there remains a school of thought that, while acknowledging the benefit to host communities of professionally organised developmental programmes, denies the value of short-term engagements such as student projects or doing projects as part of vacations, a recent phenomenon dubbed ‘voluntourism’. It has been argued that such short-term engagements are harmful to host communities in providing incoherent services of an inconsistent quality, while having no lasting developmental impact, because it is not possible to engage the local community in such a way so as to build capacity. Instead, a dependency syndrome could arise from repeated bursts of ‘giving’. Further, the volunteers gain little in the way of skills,



Earthquake damaged city, Muzaffarabad, Pakistan Earthquake 2005

personal development or knowledge of other societies as the projects are too brief, their exposure to foreign communities too short, and the snapshots of societies that they receive only lead to simplistic, idealised and often skewed impressions. It is argued that money spent on such projects is better spent on charity at home and that a genuine sense of compassion can be better developed through working with the poor and underprivileged at home.¹⁷ The view is that such projects are no more than sexy holidays designed to yield more interesting holiday snaps, a view that has plagued even Operation Raleigh/Raleigh International expeditions since the early 80s.

There is no unanimous support for this thinking, and there remains a body of believers who insist that even short projects have intrinsic value.¹⁸ When youth of the nation are engaged in overseas projects, they are 'hothoused' by removing them from familiar social, political, economic and cultural contexts; they are forced to adapt to new situations and adopt different perspectives and reference points. This challenges their established assumptions about everything, including all the circumstances of home that are familiar to them. Simultaneously, they become more global in mindset and grow in their appreciation of the benefits of home.

Moreover, an initial engagement overseas may well provide the spark for a lifetime of volunteerism at home.

Indeed, it was the realisation of such benefits to Singaporean society that led the government to support the Youth Expedition Project, originally under the auspices of the Singapore International Foundation and, latterly, under the National Youth Council.¹⁹ This project was conceived as a platform for international service learning through overseas community projects in ASEAN nations, India and China. The learning model was similar to that of the widely embraced Operation Raleigh/Raleigh International, though that was privately funded.

That the government adopted this model meant that a socio-political agenda was in place. The process was not born out of altruism, or even about vague notions of individual development and globalisation. The Youth Expedition Project, at the time the world's largest, government-funded overseas youth community service programme, came into being because it was believed that through its activities, a generation of peer leaders could be created who would be willing to serve the Singaporean community, but more importantly, appreciate and love Singapore

and the system that exists here. It is noteworthy that the chairman of Project's Advisory Panel has always been a government politician.

The Future

Assuming that the overseas development and humanitarian assistance field has the latitude to evolve to greater maturity in Singapore, what will the landscape then look like? Could Singapore aspire to have a global presence, punching above its weight, in the same way as it has done in the economic and diplomatic spheres? How could a hypothetical Singaporean global developmental agency reach out to the world?

One of the earliest and most successful non-profit volunteer sending agencies actually predates the Peace Corps. This is the United Kingdom's Volunteers Service Overseas (VSO) which was established in 1958. It is the largest independent non-governmental volunteer-based organisation in the world today. Unlike the Peace Corps, the VSO is less nationalistic and nation-centric, and has affiliate organisations in many parts of the world, with volunteers from more than a dozen countries on placement. Its aims are purely to bring development to Third World countries utilising the expertise of volunteers from many different countries.²⁰ If a Singaporean agency could develop a similar network of not only resources but also recipient countries, it could become a leader in the region and the world in global development assistance.

Could humanitarian and disaster relief organisations in Singapore come together to mutually reinforce one another's capabilities, respond with alacrity when needed and deploy efficiently and with maximum impact when a disaster strikes a neighbouring country?

A viable model already exists in the Disasters Emergency Committee, a British umbrella body formed by a group of humanitarian agencies back in 1963, but which has since grown to become a powerful coordinating mechanism that rallies the nation's compassion and ensures that funds raised go to those charities best placed to deliver timely and effective relief in each individual situation. The Committee's tag-line is simply 'working together', which says it all. Aid agencies must meet certain criteria to join and once in, contribute to the funding of a permanent secretariat that administers all the Committee's affairs and relationships, as well as provide trustees from amongst their own chief executives to join a board that also includes independent members.²¹

A similar arrangement would take the aborted 'Team Singapore' concept to a new level and greatly empower all civil agencies involved in humanitarian and disaster relief activities emanating from Singapore in a way where any organisation's status as a leader among peers does not depend on government anointment.

In globalising our economy, the Economic Development Board is pushing Singapore to become the hub of international philanthropic and non-government organisations. Tax laws have been reviewed to facilitate the entry of such organisations.²² Attracting philanthropic foundations to base their funds in Singapore would be a fillip for the economy. However, can Singapore become a hub for other global non-profits while retaining its conservative attitude towards more controversial agendas? Would, for example, Amnesty International be allowed to set up in Singapore such that it could launch criticism of our neighbours from here or, worse still, criticise the host country itself? Or Greenpeace perhaps? Even Medicin Sans Frontieres has an agenda of 'expose', that is, using its medical services in complex disaster zones to ferret out human rights abuses, corruption and scandals, so as to bring international pressure to bear. Would Singapore allow such bodies in without restraint?

As philanthropists become more sophisticated in their giving, they will increasingly desire to give according to their own strategic preferences and to develop networks of stakeholders consistent with their vision. In such an environment, agencies that are seen to be heavily patronised by government, whether this includes financial support or not, may find themselves out of favour when philanthropists consider who to give to. There are non-Singaporean foundations that, in the process of evaluating a recipient, want to know that it is free of any relationship with their respective government, that it does not receive government funding and that there is no government influence on its activities. In the area of overseas assistance, philanthropists will be keen to know that they are funding work targeting genuine needs amongst the most deserving, rather than funding a government's foreign policy agenda that does not necessarily correlate with these needs. This contrasts with funders in Singapore, who view government involvement or patronage of an organisation or project as a quality stamp of approval giving confidence that this is a sound investment of money. This cultural difference in perception is stark.

Growing Up

Singapore has an admirable substrate for the growth of organisations dedicated to international welfare. Our own indigenous agencies have considerable potential and have already shown that they can do much good work. As with the rest of the non-profit sector here, whether our organisations can develop themselves to full maturity as global players depends a lot on the support they receive, in both funding and human resources. To give the Singaporean government its due, it has, for some considerable time, greatly helped the sector with invaluable support and patronage. However, it may be time for childhood to come to an end. The sector may more quickly attain its full potential in the future with less reliance on the government.

How much the government should lead in international development and humanitarian work is debatable. Some argue that in order for a global society to mature, people should be allowed some leeway to take the lead and work alongside the government rather than on behalf of government. As with all socio-political developments in Singapore, there needs to be a willingness by the government to trust its people to do right and do good. An illustration of this is how the green movement has been released from its erstwhile tag of 'extremists with a western agenda' to be recognised for its pure objectives that add genuine value to Singapore's natural environment. So too should agencies engaged in overseas assistance be less constrained and 'managed' and be recognised and supported for the absolute benefits they bring to both recipient communities and Singaporean society.

As our society evolves and matures, our citizens will increasingly want to express their compassion for foreign communities in their own way. They will expect the government to have greater trust and accept their contributions on behalf of Singapore. Better still, they will hope that the government will support them by working in partnership. There is a new openness in government these days and there is therefore every hope that with new freedoms will come fresh ideas, bold initiatives and exuberant growth of the sector. □



Dr Tan Chi Chiu

is a consultant gastroenterologist, physician and board member of the Lien Centre for Social Innovation. He is an elected member of the Singapore Medical Council and vice-chairman of Make A Wish Foundation Singapore. He is active in global humanitarian work through leading disaster relief missions overseas.

³ Government grant makes up a lion share of the SIF funding at 60% in 2005 and 40% in 2006 or an estimated \$4-5 million. Singapore International Foundation *Annual Report 05-06* <http://www.sif.org.sg/fileadmin/pdf_files/annual_report_0506.pdf>; *Annual Report 06-07* <http://www.sif.org.sg/fileadmin/pdf_files/annual_report_0607.pdf>

⁴ Peace Corps <www.peacecorps.gov>

⁵ CapitaLand Social Responsibility <www.capitaland.com/en/AboutCapitaLand/SocialResponsibility.htm>; United Nations Development Fund for Women <www.unifemsingapore.org.sg>

⁶ *Singapore Red Cross Society Annual Report 2005*. Expenditure on international services is an estimated 6% of total expenditure and application of proceeds.

⁷ "PM Goh urges more Cooperation among NGOs on Giving Aid", *The Straits Times*, 2 September 2001

⁸ "Competition in Compassion; Lee Kuan Yew on Tsunami Relief", *Forbes*, 18 April 2005

⁹ As seen in the Forum letter contributions to the *The Straits Times* on 6 and 7 February 2001, "Singapore Needs to be more Caring" and "Government could have given more Aid".

¹⁰ Goh Chok Tong made brief references to these letters in his speech at the SIF 10th anniversary dinner <www.sif.org.sg>. See also "Singapore Aid – It's the Total Effort that Counts – PM", *The Straits Times*, 2 September 2001.

¹¹ "Tsunami Relief Supplies still here after Five Months", *The Straits Times*, 22 May 2005; "A Baptism of Fire for Singapore's NGOs", *The Straits Times*, 4 March 2005, outlines some of the consequences of overburdening of Mercy Relief, such as supplies left on the ground in Aceh and destroyed by rain, when coordination failed.

¹² *Singapore Red Cross News*, Issue 3/2007

¹³ "VVOs and NGOs to Focus on Reconstruction", 12 January 2005, Press Releases, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports <www.gov.sg/pressreleases.htm>. SRCs played the coordinating role.

¹⁴ <www.sif.org.sg/tsunami/tac_donationQnA.html#1>

¹⁵ Since December 2000, six relief missions comprising over 80 Humanitarian Relief Programme volunteers have been sent to Cambodia, Vietnam, India, Mongolia and Afghanistan, providing relief assistance to over 18 000 victims. Refer to SIF's Annual Reports for the years 2001 and 2002.

¹⁶ "Team Singapore for Quake Relief", *Today*, 15 October 2005; "Team Singapore to Leave for Quake-hit Pakistan on Tuesday", *Channel News Asia*, 14 October 2005

¹⁷ There have been many newspaper commentaries against such projects. Amongst others, "Volunteer at Home? No Thanks", *Straits Times*, 23 December 2007; "Do-Gooder Trips not the Best Way to Volunteerism?", *The Straits Times*, 11 December 2007; "Volunteerism: More Tourist than Volunteer", *The Straits Times*, 28 July 2007.

¹⁸ There were forum articles in *The Straits Times* arguing against Stanley Tan. Amongst others, "Volunteering begins at home, not abroad", by Alex Ren Ziming, 11 October 2001; "Overseas experiences encourage volunteerism" by Dr Tan Chi Chiu, 13 October 2000; and "Volunteerism – Both Sides Gain", 21 October 2000 by Chan Yew Wing. Also, see "From Voluntour to Volunteer", *The Straits Times*, 20 December 2007.

¹⁹ "Singapore's Expedition Project gets \$18 million Boost", *The Straits Times*, 11 November 2001; "Building a Firm Foundation", *The Straits Times*, 1 September 2001

²⁰ VSO, UK <www.vso.org.uk/about/>

²¹ Disasters Emergency Committee <www.dec.org.uk>

²² Budget Speech 2007, Singapore <www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2007/budget_speech/subsection10.3.html>

¹ Singapore's Human Development Index as of 2005 ranks 25th ahead of Malaysia (63th), Indonesia (109th) and Thailand (78th). Brunei comes closest at 30th. Wikipedia's List of Countries by HDI <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Human_Development_Index>

² The Singapore Cooperation Programme <<http://app.scp.gov.sg/>>